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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 004357

SIPDIS

STATE PASS AIT/W, INR/EAP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2025

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SUBJECT: PRE-ELECTION SCENESSETTER: CHIAYI CITY

REF: TAIPEI 4158

Classified By: AIT ACTING DIRECTOR DAVID J. KEEGAN, REASON(S): 1.4 (B/D)

11. SUMMARY. (C) CHIAYI CITY IS MORE THAN JUST ECONOMICALLY DEPRESSED THESE DAYS. A FUNERAL GLOOM LOOMS OVER THE DPP'S TINY CITY OFFICE, AND THE MERE SUGGESTION THAT PRESIDENT CHEN SHUI-BIAN MIGHT BE BROUGHT INTO TO ROUSE THE PARTY FAITHFUL ON BEHALF OF MAYORAL CANDIDATE CHEN LI-CHEN SENDS GHOSTLY CHILLS THROUGH THE AIR. THE ATMOSPHERE IN THE LARGE, WELL-LIT KMT OFFICES, ALTHOUGH STILL GUARDEDLY OPTIMISTIC, WAS ALL BUSINESS WITH TELEPHONE CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY ON THE FIRST FLOOR FULLY STAFFED AND OPERATIONAL. ODDLY, FOR THIS MAYORAL RACE, CHIAYI CITY'S DPP IS MORE ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT A VISIT FROM KMT CHAIRMAN MA YING-JEOU THAN IS THE KMT ITSELF. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) CLOSED UP SHOPS, A NEAR COMPLETE LACK OF CAMPAIGN POSTERS OR BILLBOARDS AND A SENSE OF DESPAIR SUMS UP WHAT IS LEFT OF CAMPAIGN ENTHUSIASM IN WHAT WAS ONCE KNOWN AS TAIWAN'S "CRADLE OF DEMOCRACY." CHIAYI CITY WAS GOVERNED FOR DECADES BY INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES, PRIMARILY A MOTHER AND SISTERS FROM THE CURRENTLY INACTIVE FACTION KNOWN AS "HSU CHIA PAN." THE FACTION SUPPORTED THE NOW-DPP CANDIDATE, INCUMBENT CHIAYI CITY MAYOR CHEN LI-CHEN, IN THE LAST MAYORAL ELECTION WHEN CHEN RAN AS AN INDEPENDENT. THE "HSU CHIA PAN" LEADER, CHANG PO-YA (FORMER CHIAYI CITY MAYOR) NOW LEADS A SUB-GROUP OF NON-PARTISAN LEGISLATORS, A FACT THAT TIES HER HANDS SO THAT SHE CANNOT COME OUT IN SUPPORT OF A DPP CANDIDATE. THIS TIME THE FACTION CANNOT AND WILL NOT EVEN TRY TO PRODUCE VOTES FOR THIS ELECTION.

13. (C) BESIDES A LOCAL ECONOMY IN TATTERS, DPP OFFICIALS TOLD AIT/K THAT THERE IS NO MORE ENTHUSIASM FOR THE DPP IN CHIAYI CITY AND THAT LOCALS ARE SICK AND TIRED OF THE DISPUTES, CORRUPTION AND CHAOS THAT NOW SURROUNDS THE ONCE POPULAR PARTY. WITH JUST A FEW WEEKS TO THE ELECTION, NO ONE AT THE CITY'S DPP OFFICE HARBORS ANY HOPE THAT PRESIDENT CHEN CAN PULL THE PARTY BACK TOGETHER IN TIME TO KEEP THE DPP INCUMBENT MAYOR IN OFFICE. THE VERY SUGGESTION THAT "A BIAN" (PRESIDENT CHEN) OR ANY OTHER NATIONAL DPP FIGURE MIGHT COME TO CAMPAIGN FOR THE DPP CANDIDATE WAS GREETED WITH GRIMACES. DPP CITY OFFICIALS REPORTED THAT BARELY 800 PEOPLE TURNED UP TO HELP OPEN CANDIDATE CHEN'S CAMPAIGN OFFICE. THERE SIMPLY, THEY SAID, IS "NOTHING TO CELEBRATE."

14. (C) UNLIKE ANY OTHER CITY OR COUNTY YET VISITED BY AIT/K, IN CHIAYI THE DPP AND THE KMT CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES ARE COMPLETELY REVERSED. WHEREAS MOST KMT OFFICES IN THE SOUTH ARE EMPHASIZING THE 3-IN-1 ELECTIONS AS A BATTLE BETWEEN PARTIES AND A PRE-CURSOR TO THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, IN CHIAYI CITY THE KMT IS USING A DPP STRATEGY OF RUNNING ON THE STRENGTH OF ITS CANDIDATE'S PERSONALITY. THE DPP, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS RUNNING ON THE "BEN TU" (LOCALISM) ISSUE BY TRYING TO CONVINCE VOTERS THIS IS A "PARTY TO PARTY" FIGHT THAT CAN BE WON ONLY IF THE VOTERS SUPPORT THE DPP. WHEN ASKED WHY IT ISN'T EMPHASIZING ITS CANDIDATE, DPP OFFICIALS DESCRIBED CANDIDATE CHEN AS SOMEONE POPULARLY KNOWN AS HAVING A VERY "BAD TEMPER."

15. (C) THE ODDEST HOPE STATED BY DPP OFFICIALS FOR THIS ELECTION IS THEIR HOPE THAT KMT'S CHAIRMAN MA WILL COME TO CHIAYI CITY TO CAMPAIGN FOR KMT CANDIDATE HUANG MING-HUI, A HIGHLY POPULAR INCUMBENT LEGISLATIVE YUAN MEMBER AND NATIVE OF CHIAYI CITY WHO HAS DEEP GRASSROOTS SUPPORT HERE DEVELOPED THROUGH HER LONG-STANDING AND EXCELLENT SERVICES TO CONSTITUENTS. THE DPP BELIEVES A VISIT BY MA, CLOSE TO THE VOTING DATE OF DECEMBER 3, WILL STIR THE POT ENOUGH TO RILE DPP SUPPORTERS TO BOTHER TO VOTE ON ELECTION DAY. IN FACT, DPP OFFICIALS THINK A PERSONAL APPEARANCE BY KMT CHAIRMAN MAY BE THE ONLY THING THAT CAN INSPIRE A SENSE OF "CRISIS" LARGE ENOUGH TO SLAP DPP SUPPORTERS OUT OF THEIR DEPRESSION. IF "A BIAN" CAN'T FIX THINGS OR THEY CAN'T FIND SOMETHING TO SLAP DPP VOTERS OUT OF THE FUNK CREATED BY A CONFLUENCE OF UNEMPLOYMENT, POOR FUTURE ECONOMIC PROSPECTS, DISGUST WITH THE DPP AND DISDAIN FOR THE DPP CANDIDATE, THEY FEAR LOW VOTER TURNOUT CERTAINLY WILL COST THEM THE ELECTION.

16. (C) COMMENT: MINUS A MIRACLE, NOTHING WILL LIFT THE GLOOM FROM THE DPP'S PERCEPTION THAT THE ELECTION IS ALREADY LOST. THE DEPRESSION AMONG DPP OFFICIALS, WHO AREN'T EVEN

BOTHERING TO PUT ON A CHEERFUL FACE IN HOPES OF GENERATING ENTHUSIASM FOR THEIR CANDIDATE, IS PALPABLE. STILL, IN AN AREA WITH TRADITIONALLY PRO-GREEN SENTIMENTS, THE KMT IS WISE TO CAMPAIGN HARD AND REMAIN CAUTIOUS UNTIL THE LAST VOTE IS CAST. END COMMENT.

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